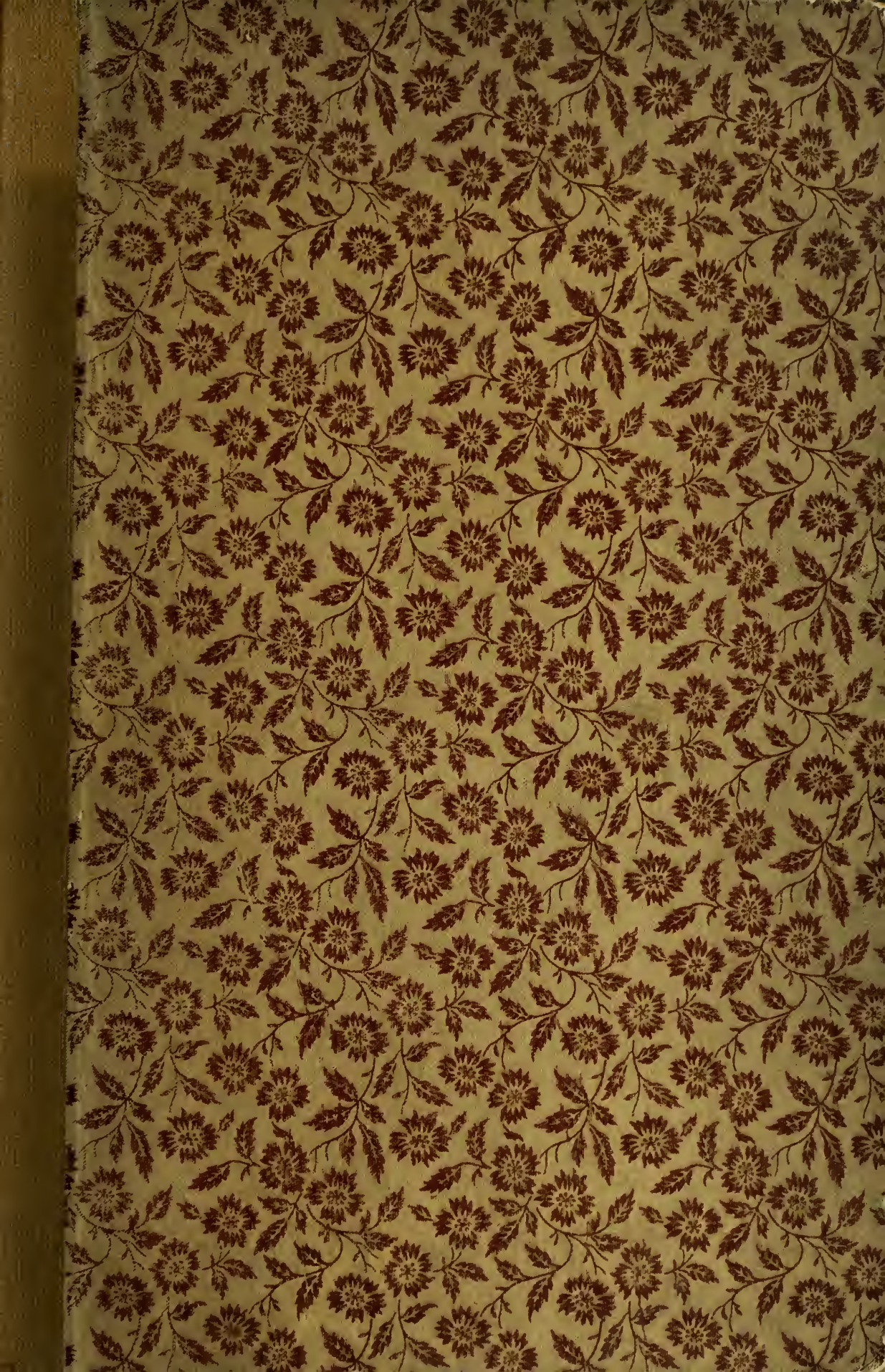




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THE ORIGIN OF THE GRACES.

MADemoiselle DIONIS DUSÉJOUR.

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THE
ORIGIN
OF
THE GRACES

By Mlle DIONIS DUSEJOUR
WITH
Illustrations by Cochin

LONDON,
VIZETELLY & CO
Henrietta Street,
Covent
Garden.

THE
ORIGIN OF THE GRACES

BY
MADEMOISELLE DIONIS DUSÉJOUR.

*ILLUSTRATED WITH THE ORIGINAL COPPERPLATE ENGRAVINGS
AFTER THE DESIGNS OF C. N. COCHIN.*

LONDON :
VIZETELLY & CO., 16 HENRIETTA STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

CHARLES NICHOLAS COCHIN.

NOTHING appears to be known of Mademoiselle Dionis Duséjour, the author of *The Origin of the Graces*, but the designer of the engravings, to which this clever little imitation of the Greek pastorals owes much of its interest, was one of the most prominent French artists of the 18th century, and his name is associated with many of the elegantly illustrated works issued in France during the half century preceding the Revolution. Charles Nicholas Cochin, born in Paris in 1715, was the son of an engraver, and the grandson of a painter of the same name ; his mother also was an artist of talent. Cochin, who inherited the artistic proclivities of the family, received instruction in drawing from Jean Restout, and in engraving from that eminent master Le Bas. He proved a most precocious pupil. A composition is extant which he is said to have engraved at the age of twelve, and at sixteen he passed for a very promising draughtsman. His first work of any importance, a series of compositions, designed and engraved by himself, typifying various trades of Paris, was only produced, however, when he was three and twenty. Three years later, in 1740, his designs for an edition of Boileau's works brought him into prominence ; and his reputation was further increased by his illustrations to Virgil issued in 1742. Soon afterwards he designed a series of small headings for an edition of La Fontaine's *Fables*, which, unfortunately, were very badly engraved. According to Baron Portalis, the original drawings, which still exist, are extremely graceful and far superior to the engravings made from them.*

* *Les Dessinateurs d'Illustrations*, &c., Paris, 1877.

Cochin had inherited a competency from his family and was received in good society. Madame de Pompadour took him into favour and obtained for him the post of draughtsman of the royal "Ménus-Plaisirs," the duties of which office consisted in depicting the various festivities and ceremonies of the court. Cochin, in this capacity, made numerous drawings of royal and princely marriages, receptions, balls, ballets, promenades, and funerals, and nearly the whole of these drawings were engraved on copper, either by himself or others. Most of these engravings are nowadays extremely rare, and command remarkably high prices. The talent which Cochin displayed as a delineator of court life led Louis XV. to grant him a patent of nobility, and to create him a knight of the royal order of St Michael. Madame de Pompadour, moreover, selected him to accompany her young brother, M. de Vandières, on a journey to Italy in the capacity of artistic mentor and cicerone; and subsequently, when she was seized with a desire to practise art herself, she appointed him her professor of engraving. Another of the royal favourite's brothers, the well-known Marquis de Marigny, who was the official superintendent of fine arts, made Cochin his everyday companion, and always consulted him on matters of the least importance. Moreover, Diderot, who called him "the first draughtsman of France," invariably sought his advice before penning his curious critiques on the Salon.

Cochin had been unanimously elected a member of the Academy of Painting in 1751, and he drew and engraved the portraits of most of his colleagues. Indeed we should be unfamiliar with the personal appearance, not only of the leading artists, but also of many of the most distinguished noblemen and wits of the 18th century, if Cochin had not limned their features. This he frequently did out of friendship and not by way of gain; and it

was in this way also that he—an assiduous frequenter of the lady's *salon*—drew and engraved the portraits of Madame du Deffand's favourite Angora cats.

Meanwhile, in his professional capacity, Cochin designed some vignettes for an edition of the younger Crébillon's tales and a series of headings for the poems of Madame Deshoulières. He next prepared the illustrations for an edition of La Fontaine's *Fables* projected by M. de Montenault. This was the so-called Oudry edition, published in 1755, which enjoys so high a reputation amongst connoisseurs. Oudry had died leaving a number of loose sketchés, some of which were touched up, improved, and finished by Cochin, whilst the remainder were completely redrawn by him, so that although the original conception of the designs may be ascribed to Oudry, they were, in point of execution, almost entirely Cochin's work.

Two years later, in 1757, Cochin furnished six designs for the well-known edition of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which was mainly illustrated by Gravelot, and to which Boucher and Eisen also contributed a few compositions. In 1758 he illustrated an edition of Piron's works, and about 1760 he began to engrave a series of views of the ports of France, after the paintings of Joseph Vernet. He supplied six illustrations for Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* issued by Molini at Birmingham in 1773; and three years afterwards he made designs for the engravings to French editions of the *Iliad* and Fenelon's *Télémaque*. It was in 1777, when Cochin had passed his sixtieth year, that he executed the compositions which illustrate the present volume, and which have always ranked among his best works.

It may be added that Cochin was engaged for several years upon a series of portraits for Hénault's *History of France*, and that he made designs for Rollin's *History of Rome*, as well as

for an elaborate edition of Molière's plays, which, however, was never completed, owing to the death of the publisher. About 1783 he produced a large number of drawings to illustrate Rousseau's works, but these proved inferior to the well-known designs by Moreau, who entered more fully into the spirit of the text. The last work of importance in which Cochin engaged was the illustration of Tasso's *Jernusalem Delivered*; in this he displayed all his customary talent, though at that time (1785) he was seventy years of age. He lived five years longer, and may be said to have worked until the last. His death took place on April 29, 1790, when the Revolution was virtually effected. The monarchy, of which he had ever been an ardent supporter, was tottering to its fall. Versailles was no longer the scene of the gay and magnificent court, the fêtes and ceremonies of which he had so often depicted, most of his old friends were dead, and he himself was in somewhat needy circumstances, due not only to the loss of the pensions he had long enjoyed but also to the hearty generosity with which, during a long and most industrious life, he had constantly befriended less successful fellow-artists.

LIST OF PLATES.

CHARIS INSPIRED BY APOLLO AND THE MUSES,	<i>Frontispiece</i>
CHARIS AND VENUS IN THE GROTTO, . . .	Canto i.
THE CEREMONY AT CORESIA'S TOMB, . . .	ii.
CHARIS GREETED BY VENUS AND THE GRACES . . .	iii.
THE FESTIVAL OF BACCHUS, ...	iv.
VENUS LAMENTING THE LOSS OF CHARIS, . . .	v.

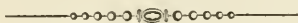


Ch. N. Cochin. Del. 1-4

J. B. Simonet. Sculp.



THE ORIGIN OF THE GRACES.



I.



RANT me your inspiration, ye Graces, while I sing of your origin. Do thou, O gentle Euphrosyne, deign to shed over my song thy sweet subtle influence; and thou, winsome Thalia, lend me thy lyre; and thou, O timid Aglaia, cast over my eyes a veil, through the meshes of whose divine gauze I may fathom the amorous mysteries which preceded your birth.

Without your aid, who indeed would dare attempt to describe the charms of the all-beauteous Venus as she broke upon the enraptured gaze of the enchanted Charis? It was while her festival was being celebrated in Cythera. Three days had she been delighting in the adoration of the worshippers in her temple, and now she was ascending back into the heavens, throned in a car of pearly nacre, drawn by two swans whose plumage dazzled with its snowy whiteness, and whose sinuous necks were circled by the azure ribbon

with which their mistress directed their course. Suddenly the Goddess was rapt in deep abstraction as she began to recall the sweet joys she had tasted in her isle of Cythera; the ribbon drooped slackly from her hands, and the swans, no longer feeling her guiding-touch, swerved from their wonted course. Ceasing to soar aloft towards bright Olympus, they amused themselves by skimming along through mid-air; and then, sweeping rapidly downwards, they drew the car towards earth.

In the island of Nicæa there lies a secluded valley. On one side it is shut in by a wood consecrated to the Muses, and on the other, which lies towards the sunset, rise up fertile slopes, glowing with the rich gifts of Bacchus and Ceres.

At the foot of these slopes is a deep grotto, the entrance of which seems to smile behind a network of green vine-branches, round which sweet roses and honey-suckle cling amorously.

From out a rock hard by springs a stream of crystal water, which hurries along, bubbling and gurgling as it speeds its way over the big stones that lie in its course, till it falls, foaming and plashing, into a reed-fringed basin, from whence it again issues in several small streamlets to irrigate the flower-enamelled turf.

It was to this beauteous valley that the immortal swans guided the car of the Queen of Cythera. As she awoke from her reverie, she gazed with admiration at the fair scene which her own presence rendered still fairer.

The fiery Sun-God was just finishing his course, and his sinking rays were gilding the tops of the hills. The trees were musical with the sweet concert of the congregated birds; the echoes of the valley repeated the gentle plashings of the stream; a soft breeze spread a delicious coolness through the air as it sported amidst the foliage; while the flowers filled it with fragrant perfume.

Venus alighted from her car, and stepped towards the pool, the pure crystal of which reflected back her fair form. So great is the charm of beauty that the Goddess stood gazing in admiration of her own loveliness. Then the limpid purity of the water made her long to bathe in it, and she unfastened her purple zone, that mystic tissue which inspires a love which none can resist, and allowed her robe of airy gauze, that had hitherto concealed a great part of her charms, to fall. Then, gathering up the golden hair which poured over her bosom in a thousand rippling curls, she fastened it together with rushes; and, giving her swans their liberty, slipped off her shoes that glowed and glistened with many-coloured gems, and stepped into the pool.

At first the water only reached as high as the Goddess's knees. Then it gradually mounted up to her bosom, and covered the beauties of her person, though without concealing them. The swans, which had followed her into the pool, surrounded her with a thousand rippling circles; and, as they alternately plunged beneath the surface of the water and then rose flying into the air, their wings rained a shower of spray over the bosom of the Goddess, who returned the attack by

tossing them a handful of grass which she had plucked from the sides of the pool. Then the birds floated up close to her and swam majestically around her. As the Goddess's hands caressed their sheeny plumage, the melodious strains of Misira, the loveliest of the swans, thrilled her heart with a paroxysm of sweet pain, and she clasped the bird in her arms, while the loving creature answered her caresses by flapping its snowy wings. Its sinuous neck was wreathed round that of Venus, and its half-opened beak was drinking in the sweet ambrosia that her scented lips exhaled, when a strain more melodious even than the musical notes of the bird broke upon the Goddess's ears. It moved her deeply, and she ceased to sport with her swans, and hastened to hide herself amongst the reeds. Several times, however, she emerged from her lurking-place to try to discover from whence the sweet voice she heard proceeded. As she cast her eyes towards the grotto, she caught sight of a shepherd at the entrance of it, accompanying himself on a lyre. Believing it to be Apollo, and imagining that he had thus disguised himself with the intention of taking her by surprise, she plunged back into the water in great trepidation. The noise of the water, which splashed up in every direction, caused the Shepherd to break off his song. He hung his lyre upon a tree, and approached the pool. Venus, who had now rendered herself invisible, recognised by his brown locks that he was not Apollo. Then her thoughts recurred to Adonis, whom the shepherd resembled not only in feature, but also in dress, for he wore a mantle of tiger-skin fastened with a blue ribbon,

the favourite colour of the Goddess of Love, and adopted by Adonis in order to please her. She sighed at the recollection, and, as she gazed yearningly at one who so resembled the lover she had lost, it was modesty alone that caused her to refrain from rendering herself visible to his eyes. Presently the shepherd returned to the grotto, and, taking down his lyre again, resumed his song.

Venus remained motionless, overcome with admiration and delight. Lying at her ease on a bed of reeds, her ears drank in the shepherd's strains, while her swans veiled her beauties with their caressing pinions.

The shepherd was singing of the loves of Diana and Endymion. "Ah! how happy was thy lot," he chanted, "O Endymion, the fairest of all the company of shepherds! how greatly to be envied of all men! Beloved of a Goddess wert thou, and thou avengedst thyself on Love by triumphing over the heart of Diana. I hail thee, cold Goddess, who becamest the tenderest of lovers, when, as, thou wert proudly traversing the firmament of heaven in thy silvery car, gliding on through the midst of the multitudinous sheen of the stars, thine eyes lighted on the plains of Caria. The flocks which had lain sheltered in the shade during the heat of the day were then sporting over the flower-embroidered turf. The shepherds, lying at the feet of their mistresses, made the echoes musical with a thousand songs of love. Endymion, Endymion alone lay slumbering apart, tasting the reposeful ease of cold indifference. Then thine eyes, O Goddess, fell upon him, and his beauty touched thy heart. Soon, soon he knew the

happiness that had befallen him, and night after night the radiant Diana, forgetting her cold and pride, left her place in heaven and came down to breathe her love in the ears of the shepherd, and to taste the delights and joys of passion in his sweet embrace."

So sang the shepherd. But now deepening shades were beginning to fall from the wings of night, and he was preparing to depart, when Venus, fearful of losing him, emerged from the midst of the reeds. Hastily she drew on her robe, and hurriedly fastened her girdle, and leaving her sandals lying upon the turf stepped forth to confront the shepherd.

The apparition of the Goddess thrilled him with an awe that was mingled with trouble. Thrice he opened his lips to speak, but words failed him. He felt that it was no mortal who stood before him, but her rush-bound hair made him doubt whether he was looking upon a deity of earth or heaven. Venus stood enjoying his embarrassment. "O thou," at length broke forth the shepherd, "O thou before whose beauty the fairest charms in the universe would seem poor and mean, deign to tell me by what miracle thou appearest before my enchanted eyes."

"Shepherd," replied Venus, "I have listened to thy strains, which have so delighted me that I purpose spending the night in this grotto that I may hear more of thy singing. Follow me fearlessly, for thou hast charmed the Goddess of Love." As she thus spoke, she entered the grotto, which her presence lighted up with a soft glow.

The shepherd told her that he had chosen this retreat to invoke Apollo and the Muses ; then he pointed out to her a soft couch of moss, upon which the all-beautiful Goddess deigned to recline. Having accorded permission to the shepherd to seat himself near her, she bade him tell her his name and the story of his life.

"Mighty Goddess," ejaculated the shepherd, "how can one think of aught but thee when thou art by? To speak to thee of myself seems beyond mortal power, yet will I do my best to obey thee.

"I was born far away from this island. My father, who was passionately fond of hunting, happened by mischance to slay a stag into which Apollo had transformed himself, after which unhappy accident he became the prey of such a consuming languor as would certainly have speedily brought him to the grave if my mother, who was devoted to him, had not consulted the oracle. The God replied that if she would save her husband she must expose the child shortly to be born to her in a certain forest, the name of which he mentioned. My mother, who was very young, and who ardently yearned for a pledge of her spouse's love, was filled with grief at this reply. She did not dare to make it known to her husband, and many a day the sun sank to rest without her having touched food, and slumber refused to grant her its balm. Broken down with grief, she at last dragged herself to a wood, that was sacred to the Muses, for the purpose of coming to a final resolution on the matter that was agonising her. Scarcely had she arrived there, when she fell on to the

ground in a fainting fit, caused by sheer exhaustion. While she lay thus, the figure of a Goddess appeared to her. Her features were those of an elderly woman who had once been very lovely, and she was arrayed in rich robes. 'Take courage, Meroc,' she said to my mother, 'I am Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses. Thy grief has touched my heart. Expose thy son without fear. I will take him under my protection. He shall be reared and educated by my daughters, and one day he shall become the favourite of that God who now causes you such distress.' After speaking these words she vanished, and, when my mother returned to consciousness, her troubled mind was at ease again. She went home to her husband, who quickly recovered his health now that Meroe had resolved to expose me in the forest. A few months later I was born, and my mother placed me in a wicker basket. Then, telling my father that I had been born dead, she carried me away to the wood. She laid me down at the foot of an oak, and, after having pressed upon me a thousand tearful kisses, she had just commenced to leave me, in accordance with the command of the oracle, when a sudden sound caused her to turn her head, and she saw Mercury, the messenger of the Gods, carrying off the basket. He tossed her a branch of laurel in token of the pardon which Apollo had granted her. My mother, recognising the effects of the protection which Mnemosyne had promised her while she lay in her trance, erected a little altar of moss, on which she sacrificed a young raven, and the Muses have let me know that she has had several other children who have made her old age happy.

“Mercury, O Goddess, bore me away to Mount Parnassus, where the Muses received me with delight, and bestowed upon me the name of Charis. I had scarcely begun to speak when Erato and Calliope strove with each other for the pleasure of instructing me. Melpomene, too, and Thalia also took part in my education, and I had barely completed my third lustrum when Apollo chose me to be the poet of his temple in this island of Nicæa, which is sacred to him. The natives are gentle and peaceable folk, who spend their time in hymning the Gods and cultivating the soil. I, like my father, love the chase, and I live for the most part in the forest, where I divide my time between my bow and my lyre. I sing of love and beauty, but on the days when sacrifices are ordained I repair to the temple to offer homage to the God whom we worship. Then the mild-mannered inhabitants of the island throng around me, for they delight in my strains, and lavish a wealth of affection upon me when they meet me.

“Such, O mighty Goddess,” concluded Charis, “is the story of my life ; but it is now, more than ever before, that I recognise the blessings of my lot since Venus deigns to interest herself in me.”

“Yes, Charis,” replied the Goddess, “thy story has indeed touched me ; but why hast thou told me nothing of thy loves ? Art thou ignorant of all that I can do for thee in that respect ? Or is it, indeed, that thy heart is still untouched ? Ah, if that were so, how happy mightest thou now be ! Endymion was a shepherd like thee ; he was not indeed so lovable as thou art, but yet he won the heart of an immortal Goddess.”

Venus could say no more. She drooped her eyes, and her divine cheeks blushed with the loveliest crimson. The shepherd had already fallen on his knees before her, when Cupid, who was looking for his mother, darted into the grotto, holding Peristera* in his hand. Behind him came Gaiety with her sweetly smiling face, and Pleasure with voluptuously languid expression. The giddy troop of the sprites of Laughter and Mirth were close by, but they did not dare to enter the cave.

"Mother," cried Cupid, as he kissed Venus, "I have been seeking for you all over Jupiter's palace. I have been back to Cythera to look for you, and I was just soaring up sadly to the heavens again, disconsolate at not being able to find you, when I happened to cast my eyes over this valley, and caught sight of your swans sporting in the pool. I quickly flew back to the earth, and, seating myself on Misira's back, I bade him bring me to you. He immediately conducted me to this grotto."

"My son," replied Venus, as she fondled him on her lap, "your eagerness to find me is very pleasing to me. Now order your attendants to prepare a meal, for I wish to remain here. This shepherd has more attractions for me than all the grandeurs of Olympus."

As soon as she finished speaking, Cupid flew off to carry out her orders, whilst Gaiety and Pleasure remained by her.

Then Charis, accompanying his sweetly musical voice with

* Peristera, Venus's dove.

his lyre, proceeded to sing the charms of the Goddess of Cythera.

“Oh ! who, great Queen of Love, could describe the sweet beauty of thy smile, or the voluptuous fire of thy glance, that is at once so softly languishing and so sparkling with life ! Who could express the snowy whiteness of thy flesh, the roseate blush of thy cheeks, and the transcendent symmetry of thy divine figure ! Thine eyes have the fire of rubies ; thy hair has a more lustrous sheen than have the locks of Hebe herself ; thy hands seem as though they were wrought out of ivory by Cupid’s self, and thy feet are small as his own. Never, O Queen of Beauty, shall I cease to sing thy charms, but alas ! my song will ever fall far below them. Yet I can at least ever worship them, and my love shall equal them, if not my praises.”

The son of Venus now returned into the grotto, bearing with him the fruits he had just gathered. The sprites of Mirth and Laughter drew near to wait upon their Queen. Some of them laid a cloth of filmy gauze upon the turf, while others arranged the fruit on large leaves. Cupid himself returned to the spring, and brought back a supply of the crystal water in capacious shells. Venus, delighted at the simplicity of the feast, herself selected the fairest of the fruit and offered them to her shepherd. Gaiety proffered them cooling draughts, while the sprites of Mirth and Laughter afforded them amusement by their infantine rivalries, for all were anxious to render service to their Queen.

Cupid, jealous of their display of eagerness, ordered them

to cease their ministrations, and took upon himself the task of waiting upon his mother. The sprites of Mirth and Laughter avenged themselves by mischievously spilling a shell of water over his glistening wings. This irritated him, and Venus scolded him. Angered the more, Cupid now muttered below his breath that he would have his revenge.

When the meal was over, Venus carelessly reclined herself upon the mossy couch. Gaiety fettered her with the garlands of flowers which Peristera had brought in its beak, whilst Pleasure spread her hair over her bosom. Charis, the happy Charis, gazed rapturously at the enchanting vision, and Cupid, vexed with his mother, lurked in a corner of the grotto, planning schemes of vengeance.

He seized the moment when Venus was casting tender glances at Charis, and, fitting his sharpest arrow to his bow, he discharged it at the shepherd. Gaiety immediately tossed over them Pleasure's veil, while the sprites ran off with Cupid, who chuckled over the vengeance he had taken.





C. de la L.

D. de la S. 1776



II.

IN vain had the creeping ivy and jasmine, which interlaced their branches across the entrance of the grotto, hidden from the peeping stars the frailty of the Queen of Cythera ; in vain had Pleasure covered her with her veil ; for the rays of the dawning day are piercing the network of the branches, and will presently discover to Phoebus the blissful fortune of Charis.

Peacefully slumbering in the arms of his divine mistress, the shepherd lay inhaling the ambrosia which breathed from her coral lips, when the watchful Peristera woke the pair by flapping her wings.

“The day is dawning,” Venus exclaimed, “Phoebus is inquisitive and given to gossiping ; let us keep our love a secret from his prying curiosity.”

Charis then proposed that she should go and witness the festival of Coresia, which was about to be celebrated in the sacred wood. He took up his lyre, and, followed by the faithful dove, the pair left the grotto, the Goddess leaning on the shepherd’s arm.

As they crossed the grassy floor, whereon flowers seemed to spring up at the touch of Venus's feet, Charis told the Queen of Love the history of the origin of the festival of Coresia.

"There formerly dwelt," he said, "in the island of Nicæa, a maiden named Coresia. She was dowered with the gift of perfect beauty, but her heart was utterly indifferent to the influence of love. The favourite of the Muses, she imitated their chastity. Spending all her time in solitude in the depths of the forest, she devoted her whole mind to poetry, tracing her verses upon the sandy ground, and scratching them on the bark of the trees. Liberty was the subject of all her singing. It was all in vain that the fondest shepherd swains tried to soften her cold rigidity. She fled from them in utmost haste, scaling the steepest rocks, and swimming across pools to elude the pursuit of those who would have proffered her their love.

"One day, however, as she lay asleep beneath a clump of willows, the young Evander took her by surprise, and forced her to yield to his wishes. Coresia, in the bitterness of her grief, pierced the rash youth's heart with a dagger which she carried in her girdle, and then slew herself, having first scratched the story of her woe upon a stone. The Muses bewailed her, and themselves built her a tomb in the wood, but the body of Evander they cast into the sea. From time to time, ever since, many beautiful girls, following Coresia's example, have consecrated themselves to the Muses. Once every spring all the virgins of the island assemble around her tomb to do honour to her memory. A bird, sent by the

Muses, hangs a crown of ivy on an ancient oak ; and after the memorial hymns have been chanted, the young maiden who most yearns to resemble Coresia receives the crown from the bird. Then she pledges herself by oath to live indifferent to love, and, plunging into the depths of the forest, is seen no more amongst her comrades."

Charis had already advanced far into the forest before he brought his narration to a close. Venus, for whom the sound of his voice had a lasting charm, now asked him if the characters which she observed cut on the bark of the trees and on several little altars of stone were the work of Coresia.

"There are several poets," replied the shepherd, "who have thus inscribed their hymns in honour of the Muses. Amongst these altars there is one here, O Goddess, which I myself have raised to Apollo. On it you will see recorded the amours of the God with Daphne, and the transformation of the nymph into a laurel."

"Ah, I know the story," returned the all-beautiful Venus, "but I should greatly like to hear it breathed forth on your lyre, the notes of which, my Charis, seem sweeter to me than even those of Apollo's. Let us rest for a while on this bed of fern. We have time enough to spare, since the festival does not commence till sun-down."

As she spoke, she unslung the Shepherd's lyre, and Charis commenced to sing in such a sweet melodious strain that the very streams hushed their murmurs, and the birds their warbling.

As his song proceeded, he thrilled the heart of Venus with both the love-fever of Apollo and the alarm of Daphne. She fancied she could see the nymph flying before the pursuit of the God who adored her. She could see her fair locks floating loose in the wind, for in the maiden's hurried flight the ribbon which restrained them had fallen away. Then she saw the God stretching out his hand to seize the robe of the flying nymph, which, disarranged by her precipitate retreat, already allowed no small portion of her charms to appear in sight. Now the Goddess believes she can hear the prayers which the nymph addresses to her father, and her sighs at being so speedily heard. She sees Daphne's arms, as she strains them heavenwards, changing into branches, and her fingers into leaves, and finally she can feel her heart throbbing beneath the bark which covers it, and she sees Apollo clasping in his embrace the melancholy tree which bars his mistress from him.

"Cease, cease, my Charis!" cried the spell-bound Venus; "thy verses are too touching, thy lyre is too affectingly melodious. Who, indeed, could hope to withstand its voluptuous charm, since even a Goddess yields to the sweet intoxication with which thy accents thrill her senses? Sweet shepherd, thou alone art worthy to sing the tender stories of love, and thou alone shalt enchant with thy magic spell the Queen of Love herself."

Charis heard Venus's praises with a transport of pleasure. The Goddess accompanied them with a thousand fond caresses, which the shepherd delightedly returned. The full

light of day, however, now causing the shepherd to put bounds to his desires, he conducted his beloved Goddess by a shady path to a hill on which they found a rustic temple. On entering it, Venus was pleasantly surprised at the sight of three statues carved out of the purest white marble. They represented three maidens, whose forms were bare, and who were linking themselves together with garlands of flowers.

The first one was looking at the others with such an indescribable glance of seductive tenderness that Venus was at first inclined to believe that she represented Pleasure. Her head was drooping languidly, and the damsel seemed to be voluptuously inhaling the perfume of the garland which she held raised in one hand, while with the other she linked her companions to herself.

Venus, silent with admiration, believed that nothing could be more beautiful than this statue ; but presently turning her eyes to the second one she recognized something that was possibly even still lovelier. Mirth sparkled in its eyes, a charming smile half-opened its lips, and a thrill of voluptuous pleasure gave a throbbing life to its beautiful breast, which seemed to be actually heaving before the Goddess's eyes, with such wondrous skill had the sculptor imitated nature.

Venus now stood undecided as to which of the two statues she should award the meed of superiority ; but, turning to look at the third one, she was filled with yet greater admiring astonishment.

The third statue had the child-like features and figure of a shepherdess maiden that had scarcely completed her third

lustrum. Her eyes were turned to the ground, and she seemed to be striving to conceal with her garland the budding charms of her bosom, while her expression told of her embarrassment at thus beholding herself quite naked.

The Queen of Cythera, having examined each statue separately, and looked at the whole group together, found them even more charming than before. She could not tear her eyes away from a sight that was at once so lovely and so original. Three separate times she touched the smooth marble with her divine hands to assure herself that the fair stone did not actually breathe with life; but the coldness of the marble proved to her that the figures were but figures. As she stepped away from them, she again began to feel doubtful as to whether they could really be only lifeless marble. The shepherd observed her embarrassment with considerable amusement.

"Tell me," she cried to him at last, "by what wondrous art has it been possible to produce these three statues so charming in their different natures; and who are the mortal damsels who have served as models for them, for we have no Goddesses as fair as they, and my girdle even cannot confer such sweet charms."

"Goddess, I alone am the inventor and designer of these statues; my imagination has revealed them to me such as thou now beholdest them. I have described their charms in my songs, and a skilful sculptor, seizing my ideas, has succeeded in rendering them visible."

"O mortal highly favoured by the Gods," replied Venus,

"thou then art their parent. It causes me, indeed, no surprise, since I have heard the melody of thy strains. But can it be possible that the Niciæans have so little idea of the worth of these prodigies that they allow such wondrous works to lie hidden in a wood?"

"The Niciæans," answered Charis, "cherish these statues greatly; they even render them a sort of worship. It is on this account that they have placed them in this temple, where they are protected from the ravages of the weather. I have bestowed upon them my own name, and have called them the three Charities, or Graces. To distinguish them one from another, the first is known as Euphrosyne, the second as Thalia, and the third as Aglaia. Such, most beauteous Venus, is the story of their origin. But the hour of the celebration is now approaching; and, if thou desirest to witness it, we must make our way down into the wood."

It was only with the greatest reluctance that Venus could prevail upon herself to leave the temple of the Graces. She felt that she could never look at them enough, and she entertained an ardent desire to obtain power from Jupiter to endow them with life, so that she might have them for companions. Wishful, however, to keep this in reserve as a pleasant surprise for Charis, she maintained silence as to her design, and told him, as they descended the slope of the hill, that a secret command would compel her to return to Olympus after sunset.

On hearing this the shepherd suffered the keenest pangs of grief. He tried to express his woe, but his lips were

incapable of giving utterance to speech. He cast a despondent gaze upon his beloved mistress, who, now that he was about to lose her, seemed even still more beauteous than before. Overcome with the extremity of his grief, he stayed his steps, and, seizing her hand, he pressed it within his own, and covered it with passionate kisses. Then he gave a deep sigh, and seemed on the point of bursting into tears.

“O sweet Queen of Love,” at last he cried, “thou who hast given me such delicious proof of the power of thy ineffable charms, thou who hast deigned to indulge my love, thou art then going to desert me ! O cruel Venus, since thou mayest not remain on earth, why, oh why, didst thou ever show thyself to me ? Why hast thou broken in upon my peaceful calm ? Oh, what am I saying ? Pardon me, I pray thee ! What price, indeed, could be too great for the delights which I have tasted with thee ? They will cost me my life, indeed ; for I can never survive thy absence.”

“Hush, hush !” replied Venus ; “talk not like that, for thy death would make my immortality hateful to me. But indeed thou mistakest me, my Charis ; I do not mean to desert thee, I am only leaving thee for a season, that I may obey orders which may not be disregarded ; and I swear to thee by Love’s own self that I will be back with thee by the break of dawn.”

Like a timid bird that has fled affrighted before a storm, and has then regained the dripping branches to hail with its warbling notes the return of sunshine and the soft zephyrs,

so now was the loving shepherd reassured by the promise of his divine mistress. Before leaving earth, however, Venus desired to see the celebration in honour of Coresia.

The thousand mournful sounds that were echoed around announced that it had already commenced. The Nicæan maidens, spreading themselves about the wood, were uttering wailing cries, and testifying their grief by lugubrious chants in honour of the dead Coresia. Some of them extolled her beauty, and bewailed that so fair a maiden should have perished in the flower of her youth. Others vowed to imitate her in her cold indifference to love, even though the crown were not awarded to them; while others again, animated by a celestial influence, the inspiration, doubtless, of the Muses, launched a thousand imprecations against the spirit of the unhappy Evander. Like so many raging Bacchantes they tore their hair, and smote their breasts, as they made the air resound with their cries of grief.

As the Queen of Love approached the tomb and saw the crown of ivy already hanging upon the oak, she regretted the heart which a cold indifference was to remove for ever from her son's influence.

"If Cupid were here," she said to the shepherd, "I would bid him wing an arrow at the heart of every maiden in Nicæa."

Cupid, indeed, was not far off. He heard his mother's words, and thinking the opportunity a favourable one for making his peace again, he appeared in sight, crowned with roses, and bearing a quiver charged with golden arrows.

Venus had already forgotten her son's vengeance; she was delighted to see him again, and made both him and herself invisible.

After seeing Venus disappear, and having breathed out countless deep sighs at being severed from her, the favoured poet of Apollo, the only one of his sex admitted to the ceremony, directed his steps to a part of the forest where the maidens of Nicæa were waiting for him. There he received from the hands of the youngest of them, named Cephissa, a veil of black crape, whose long loose folds reached down to his feet, and concealed him from the eyes of all. Then a crown of cypress leaves was placed upon his head. Being thus installed as the high-priest of the sacrifice, he headed the procession, and as he advanced he was followed in silence by the young virgins in two files, wearing veils of transparent gauze. When they reached the tomb, they formed themselves into a semicircle about it; and Charis, standing in the middle, having given the signal by stretching out his right arm, each maiden let her veil fall. The veils, being fastened at the shoulder, now formed a sort of mantle, and served as a picturesque addition to the long purple robes in which the damsels were clad.

What an array of loveliness now burst into the view of the setting sun! It seemed as though Phœbus were staying his chariot to admire it through the labyrinth of trees. The perfectly moulded figures of the virgins were decked with garlands of ivy, whose dusky green lent an additional brilliance to the dazzling whiteness of their bosoms; and their luxuriant

sheeny locks were girt with sprays of cypress, which hung down over their ivory shoulders.

From the cloud to which she had retired, Venus looked down upon the spectacle. "Haste thee quickly, my son," she exclaimed to Cupid, "and make these fair but cold maidens thy victims."

Eager as his mother to see the hearts of these lovely damsels sighing with love, Cupid grasped his bow ; and, while Charis was pouring libations upon the tomb, he discharged his arrows, the points of which had been dipped in the tears of dreamy Languor and voluptuous Pleasure. The little God is an unerring marksman, and not a heart escaped his missiles.

As when tranquil waters, that mirror the cloudless azure of the sky upon their serene bosom, are suddenly lashed by a furious squall, a thousand silvery waves surge up and fall in breaking spray, so now the beauteous maids of Nicæa, stricken by the arrows of Cupid, no longer knew the quiet calm of cold indifference, but suddenly became the prey of the secret fires which had just pierced their souls. Amazed at the change which had come over them, and speechless from surprise, they knew not what they wished for, and feared to find it out. That crown, which but a moment before they had so eagerly yearned for, now only seemed to inspire them with a mortal terror ; and the thought of binding themselves to a life of cold indifference to love was hideous to them. It was as though some heaven-sent light had suddenly flared out, and revealed to them the existence of an awful chasm, into which

they were on the point of casting themselves. But as each one of the band of gentle maidens was ignorant of the fact that her companions' hearts were throbbing with similar fires, they all reproached themselves for the feelings that were agitating them, and bent their sweet eyes to the ground lest their sin should be read in them. Many there were, however, who could not restrain their sighs, as they bethought them of the gentle shepherds whose tender pleadings they had so often rejected.

Amongst these latter was the young Cephissa, whose golden locks, and snowy skin, and delicately tinted complexion had attracted the especial attention of Venus. As the beautiful maiden thought of the faithful Zamis, who had sworn to die if she obtained the crown of Zamis, who had been her lover ever since she was a child, she felt the tears rolling down her cheeks. She might, perchance, have lent an ear to his pleadings, if her mother had not extolled to her the greater happiness of a life of indifference to love, and so induced her to shun Zamis that she might follow the example of Coresia.

Acting either by the special command of Venus, or else for the purpose of rewarding the faithful Zamis, Cupid seemed to have stricken Cephissa more deeply than any of the other maidens. Her painful commotion increased, and she could scarcely prevent her trouble from becoming openly visible.

"What is it that I am doing?" she cried in her heart. "My rash longing to obtain yonder crown is making me endanger the very life of the sweetest of all the company of the shepherds. Ah! Zamis, I feel now that I have always loved

thee without knowing it. My mother's counsels have made me stifle the true promptings of my heart, and, alas! how am I now punished for so doing! But, my sweet Zamis, thou shalt not die alone; thy heart-broken Cephissa will not survive thee. Oh, what is it that I am saying, miserable girl that I am! On whose image are all my thoughts now centred? Surely I shall excite against me the wrath of the deities to whom I have consecrated myself! And yet, alas! what fate can they mete out to me that could be more cruel than that which I am already suffering? Oh, pardon me, shade of Coresia! Be not angered at those sighs which I never foresaw when I vowed to follow in thy steps. The sacrifice of my life shall make atonement to thee. Ah, fearful thought, perhaps even a more terrible one still is now preparing! At this very moment Zamis is expecting to die, and it is I who will pronounce his sentence of death by a hateful oath! Zamis's father, that dear old man, will weep the loss of his son, and it is I, wretched girl, who will be the cause of it! Oh, Zamis! Zamis!"

The grief which was now distracting Cephissa was so intense, that she could not restrain herself from repeating her lover's name aloud, and her next neighbour, a maiden named Zoe, overheard her.

"What is it that thou art saying of Zamis?" she asked of Cephissa.

"That I adore him!"

"And I," continued Zoe, "now feel as though I loved Odalis, and the thought of obtaining the crown makes me

tremble. But, dear Cephissa, it is not yet too late ; let us retire before we take the oath."

"I should dearly like to do so," answered Cephissa, "but I fear that such an action would render me unworthy of the virtuous Zamis, and so I prefer to die should the crown fall to me."

Such was the grievous trouble that racked the hearts of the two fond maidens. Charis had by this time completed the ceremony of the libations, and now returned to the centre of the circle. Again he stretched out his arm as a signal to the virgins to recommence their chants in honour of a life of cold indifference to love, but not a single one of the maidens could force her lips to utter the words, and the hitherto frigid Dolia, whose duty it was to lead the chorus, remained mute as the others. Charis was just beginning to suspect the cause of this silence, when a sudden noise broke upon his ears, and a throng of shepherds appeared in sight. Cupid was leading them, in spite of the risk he ran of offending the Muses in so doing. And who is there that would not obey the commands of Love?

Zamis, looking like Mars's self, when the War-God is angered, was at their head; despair and hope alternately dominating in his glance. At the sight of her lover, the tender-hearted Cephissa trembled with alarm as she feared lest the Muses might punish him for his temerity.

"What art thou doing?" she cried to him. "Oh, flee away from these places which the Deity has hallowed! I tremble for thy life!"

Then she fell into Zamis's arms. Already had the shepherd read his happiness in the fainting glance of the young maiden's eyes. He was just preparing to carry her off, and all the other shepherds were urging the virgins they loved to follow them, when the bird of the Muses appeared on the summit of the oak, and thrilled the whole assembly with a superstitious dread. The conscience-stricken damsels, recognising their guilt, and fearing the vengeance of the Muses, fell fainting at the feet of the shepherds, who had stood motionless, by the command of Charis, at the appearance of the bird.

Zamis laid the fainting Cephissa on Coresia's tomb; and, like an angry lion fearing for the safety of his young cubs, stood keeping guard over her, resolved to defend her to his last breath.

The sacred bird, after having flown several times round the oak, now took the ivy-crown in its beak. Those of the virgins who had recovered their senses were hoping that they might no longer be worthy of it, and shivering with dread at the thought of its being awarded to them, when the bird suddenly soared up into the heavens and disappeared.

As a flock of fear-stricken sheep, who have scattered in terror at the sight of a fierce wolf, troop together again under the protection of their shepherd's crook, so now the young virgins surrounded the divine poet and took counsel with him as to what they should do to appease the anger of the Muses.

Charis was reassuring them, and telling them that the

Muses would pardon an involuntary sin, when a dove with a plumage of dazzling whiteness appeared in the air, holding a crown of roses in its beak. It was Peristera, who, carrying out the commands of Venus, now placed on Cephissa's brow the crown of Love.

Straightway the forest re-echoed with a thousand cries of glad delight; and Charis having told the Nicaean maidens that it was to Venus that they owed their happiness, they vowed that in future the yearly celebration should be held in honour of the Queen of Cythera, as a testimony of their gratitude to her. Then they engraved the history of the triumph of Cephissa and Zamis on Coresia's tomb; and the happy lovers having sworn mutual fidelity in the presence of Charis, the light-hearted throng wandered off in different directions through the wood to secluded glades and thickets, where the dawn of day still found them.

Charis, left alone, saw Venus ascending into the heavens, throned on a cloud, and accompanied by her son and her dove. He strained out his arms towards her with a sigh. The Goddess replied with a sweet smile, and then, tossing him a feather from Cupid's wing, disappeared from his sight.



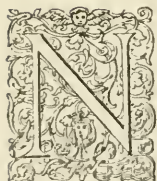


C. N. Cochius del.

L. J. Mangelor Sculp. 1776



III.



NATURE had scarcely yet awakened to greet the breaking dawn. Throned in her ruby car, Aurora arose to put the timid Shadow-sprites to flight, and pour her golden light once again over the gladdened earth. The little birds greeted the first rays with a sweet warbling from beneath their mothers' wings, and the young fauns had already set their snares for the fluttering songsters beneath the concealing leaves. In just such a way does Love conceal beneath flowers the snare in which he hopes to trap the guileless shepherdess maiden.

Awaking from a delicious dream in which it had seemed to him that he was again gazing upon the all-beauteous Venus, Charis took his lyre, and, seating himself beneath a young elm, thus gave utterance to the sweet pain that was tormenting him.

“If separation so cruelly torture the heart which Love has stricken, and which, while it dare not reveal the fires which consume it, can only hope that they will also burn within the absent one, how much more cruel is it to a lover who has

read with certainty his happiness in the eyes of his adored one ! The recollection of his past joys fills the cup of his agony. Like a tender blossom bereft of the caresses of Zephyrus, he languishes and fades away with withering grief. Surely, alas ! the Gods will not readily let Venus leave them again ; and will not some divine lover be preferred to me ? I can scarce believe that a simple shepherd swain should succeed in winning the constancy of the sweetest of Heaven's Immortals. Oh ! the very thought of losing her racks me with torture ! Already is Aurora unfolding her gleaming pinions, and Venus comes not ! O my sweet Goddess, if thou delayest thy coming longer, I shall surely die of my weary longing for thee ! ”

Overcome by the deepest dejection, the shepherd let his lyre fall from his hands. He sat rigid as a statue, plunged in a profound reverie, from which he was aroused by the noise made by a dove amongst the branches as she strove to escape from a pursuing male-bird. Soon she became the prize of her vanquisher, and her caresses and the tremulous flutter of her wings showed that she pardoned him. The sight interested Charis, but what was his delight on recognizing Peristera, who, disengaging herself from the tender gallantries of her still pursuing lover, invited the shepherd to follow her by flitting towards the wood !

The Queen of Cythera had obtained from Jupiter the power to confer life upon the three statues in the temple of Nicæa. Who, indeed, can refuse the petitions of Beauty ? The King of the Gods, charmed by what Venus had told him, and

always desirous of pleasing her, had even promised more than she had asked, and had told her that he would dower the Graces with immortality, and that their influence should breathe fresh beauties into the world of men and nature.

Venus, transported with delight, speedily returned to earth, and before Charis commenced sighing forth his amorous complaints she was already in the temple of the Graces, attended by all her court. It was she who, in her anxiety to see her lover again, and to enjoy his astonishment, had sent Peristera to him.

As soon as Charis entered the wood, he was surprised at the change which he noted in it ; and which he attributed to the influence of the Queen of Love. "What is there, indeed," he exclaimed, "that she would not make the fairer? Everything here testifies to the spell of her enchanting presence. These once rough and tortuous paths, worn bare by the pattering feet of scampering sheep, are now glowing with the freshest turf ; the branches form vaults of pleasant shade with their amorous interlacings ; the foliage glistens with richer tones ; the melody of the birds seems sweeter than before ; and there is a new music in the gurgling of the streams. But what fresh prodigy is this?" continued Charis, as he caught sight of a troop of young girls dancing on the turf to the strains of some rustic instrument. "These simple shepherdesses whom I have seen a thousand times driving their flocks into these woods seem to have acquired fresh charms. Their features sparkle with an unwonted animation ; their figures are more graceful than they used to be ; their flower-

girded hair, their ribbons, the blossoms in their bosoms, everything about them, indeed, seems to have acquired a new character, and everything contributes to make them more captivating than before. How admirably they keep time with the music! What precision and lightness mark their motions, and what a chain of ravishing beauty they form when their shapely arms link them one to another!"

Leaving the shepherdesses behind him, Charis saw that he was now near the hill on which stood the temple of the Graces, but it was all in vain that he looked about him for the gloomy alley which led to it. It was transformed into an arching grove of myrtles and jasmine, at the entrance to which a pair of orange-trees formed a charming porch. The beautiful dove, after a momentary rest upon their perfumed branches, continued to flit onwards in front of the shepherd, till it shortly brought him to the foot of the hill. There steps of grassy turf, bordered with violets, had been cut in the slope of the ascent, and up these he made his way to the temple of the Graces. But how changed was this temple since the breath of life had animated the statues!

Two rows of columns of the fairest white marble, wreathed with garlands of roses, formed an oval arcade; and between each pair of columns was a small basin from which, by a system of underground pipes, fountains of crystalline perfumed water gushed forth. In the centre of the oval, which, being open to the air, revealed to view the cloudless sky, the Queen of Cythera herself was seated on a throne of roses, culled for her by her retinue of cherub Loves. A single star gleamed

in her golden locks. Never before had her beauty shone so transcendently. The Graces, whom she had just dowered with the gift of life, had heightened and perfected her own charms. They were clustering round the Goddess, eagerly testifying their gratitude to her by their fond caresses. They were naked, adorned only with their garlands, which they twined round Venus, who received their homage with visible delight. Cupid, seated on his mother's lap, had forgotten Psyche to worship them. The sprites of Mirth and Laughter, and all the company of Pleasures and Delights, darted forward in a throng. Flora, followed by Zephyrus, hastened to beautify the court of Venus by her presence, decked with the fairest flowers of spring. The youthful Hebe followed to pour out the nectar. The immortal swans sported in the basins, while the doves reposed amidst the garlands of roses which decorated the columns of the temple.

As Charis approached, the celestial throng made way for him. Who shall describe his rapturous delight as his eyes caught sight of the Queen of Love, who had already left her throne to meet her lover!

"My daughters," she exclaimed to the Graces, "behold your sire! It is to the brilliance of his imagination that you owe your charms, as it is to the tender affection with which he inspires me that you owe your life."

As soon as Venus had thus spoken, the voluptuous Euphrosyne approached Charis. "Yes, thou art indeed my sire," she said to him with a glance of tender affection, "for what other than thou could have engendered our charms?"

Quickly after Euphrosyne followed the sweet Thalia, with her smiling eyes. "We shall ever keep near thee," she said to the Shepherd; "we will guide thy pen, and thy writings shall testify to all men that thou art the father of the Graces."

Charis stood motionless with admiration, and he was quite incapable of expressing what he felt. Though in the Graces he recognised his own work, he could not prevent himself from admiring both the sweetly majestic features of Euphrosyne and the merry brightness that illumined the countenance of Thalia. He examined them one after the other, and he could not tell which he admired the more. Then he looked at them both together, but this only served to increase his embarrassment. Such another embarrassment have men been seen to experience in presence of a captivating Queen, who uniting in her person all the charms of the Graces, distracts the hearts of her adorers with admiration of her beauties and her virtues.

The youngest of the Graces, the bashful Aglaia, had shyly concealed herself behind Venus's throne. Her sisters took her by the hands, and, drawing her forth, brought her to Charis in spite of her resistance. As she stood before the shepherd she drooped her eyes, and her cheeks flushed a rich vermilion, which contrasted charmingly with her long black eyelashes.

"Oh, do thou," exclaimed Charis, as he took her by the hand, "do thou whose look of ingenuous candour tells me thou art incapable of deceiving me, tell me by what miracle thou now breathest the breath of life amidst the Immortals."

“Ah!” replied Aglaia, blushing still more deeply, “thou hast dowered us so richly with charms that Venus has desired to have us ever near her, and has chosen us to be her companions.”

The happy shepherd fell at the knees of his divine mistress; and his joy culminated as the Goddess crowned her kindness by inviting him to follow her to Cythera.

“I love thee passionately,” she said to him. “It would cost me bitter grief to part from thee. Come, then, to the island of Cythera; the worship that I receive there will be sweeter to me if shared by thee. Leave the temple of Apollo, and come to that of Venus. Come and rule over the Loves, over their Queen, and over the hearts of all.”

Intoxicated by the favours of Venus, Charis forgot the oath which bound him to the temple of Apollo; and he promised to follow her, and to live for her, and for her only. He promised it in the presence of Cupid, who applauded his mother’s choice.

While Charis was receiving the caresses and endearments of the Immortals, the young Cephissa and her companions were rambling through the forest, admiring the transformation which had come over it, without understanding what had caused it. Soon they lost themselves in the flower-enamelled paths, which presently brought them to the foot of the hill, where they once more met their shepherd-swains who had gone to render homage to Venus.

Each maiden followed her conqueror, and the loving throng made their way to the temple.

Cephisssa led the procession, leaning on the arm of the loving Zamis. Her brow was still circled by the crown which Cupid had bestowed upon her. Next came Zoe, accompanied by her faithful Adalis.

The dusky Chloe, enamoured of the comely Hippias; the bashful Naïs, who even yet scarce dared look into the face of Egeris, though he was now her husband; the agile Zima, whose flying feet the hunter Altamor had outstripped, thus winning the maiden for his bride;—these, and a countless throng of other youths and maidens, displaying beauties as varied as are the glowing colours of earth's gems, crowded together in the temple to witness the triumph of Charis.

What is already lovely the influence of the Graces renders still more so; and such is their wondrous power of endowing beauty with an additional refinement of brilliance that as soon as Cephisssa and her companions entered their presence the damsels seemed radiant with fresh charms, and their lovers gazed at them with mingled surprise and delight, and breathed out a homage of tender sighs to the Queen of Love.

Charis, still lying at the feet of Venus, now besought her to withdraw herself from her brilliant retinue. Straightway a cloud of gold and azure rose around the throne and veiled them from the sight of all. Then strains of divine music broke through the air, and the doves accompanied the melody with their cooing notes. While Cupid presided over the joys of his mother, Zephyrus, the giddy Zephyrus, was tormenting the gentle Flora with his eager love.

Soon, however, he deserted her to follow the Graces. One

moment he was dallying with the sheeny locks of Thalia, and the next he seemed longing to rest his head on the bosom of Euphrosyne. But when the eldest of the Graces appeared wishful to detain him, he slipped away from her, and skipped off to Aglaia, who was sporting with the young Naïs. At the sight of Zephyrus her cheeks crimsoned with blushes. Laughing at her timid embarrassment, the graceless youth snatched a kiss from her budding lips. Naïs now avenged Aglaia by seizing hold of Zephyrus's wings. In vain did he plead for pardon and release; but just as the maiden was making ready the ribbon with which she was about to enchain him, a bee stung her finger, and forced her to let him go. This was the work of Flora who was on the watch to preserve her faithless lover's liberty. Zephyrus's heart was touched, and he flew to the nymph's feet, and won his pardon from her.

Naïs was now suffering great pain from the sting. She could not restrain her wails of anguish, and tears streamed down her cheeks. Aglaia wiped them away with a tenderly caressing hand, and was about to lead her to the temple, there to make her complaint to Venus, when the Goddess herself appeared, leaning on Charis, and followed by all her court. Compassionating the tears of Naïs, "My son," she said to Cupid, "this maiden's pain must be assuaged." Cupid, noticing the presence of Egeris, conducted him to the fair sufferer, and her lover's kiss at once made her forget her pain.

The Hours, the daughters of the Sun, now appeared in the sky, seated on the silver cloud which was to carry Venus back to Olympus.

"I am obliged to leave thee again," she said to her Shepherd; "the Gods are impatient to know the Graces. I have promised Jupiter to take them to him to-day; but we shall soon be restored to each other again, for it is in my mind to make you immortal."

As she finished speaking, the cloud rested on the ground, and the Goddess together with the Graces, seated herself upon it, after casting a loving glance at Charis. Soon the cloud began to soar up into the heavens, while Cupid and Zephyrus flitted round it, accompanied by the sprites of Mirth and Laughter. Venus's eyes still strained towards earth with a sweetly languishing glance; and the Nicæans raised their hands, and gazed at the fair sight in rapt delight. But soon nothing remained of it, save the fragrance of the ambrosia with which the youthful Hebe had perfumed the air.



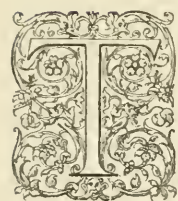


C. V. Cochin Fecit del

V. De Launay Sculp



IV.



THE rising moon was just beginning to cast her gentle glow over the darkened earth ; a myriad of stars peeped through the interlacing foliage, while their twinkling fires were mirrored in the smooth clear waters of the streamlets ; and here and there a love-sick nightingale or echo-sprite sang out responsive notes to the strains of Charis, who was chanting the beauties of Venus. Suddenly a noise like the sound of a nimble fawn clearing the branches interrupted the poet's eulogy. In the pale light of the moon he espied a goat-footed Satyr hurrying off into the recesses of the forest, bearing in his arms a young maiden, whom he appeared to be abducting. The surprised shepherd immediately hastened in the track of the Satyr, who fancying that he had reached a spot where he would be safe from pursuit, had seated himself on the turf at the foot of a tree.

Charis scrutinised him without allowing himself to be seen. By the girl's garb he saw that she was a Bacchante. She was robed in a tiger skin, and her loose locks were ornamented only with a wreath of vine leaves. As she remained quite

motionless, and the Satyr appeared troubled, Charis approached, prompted by a feeling of sympathetic pity; but the Satyr, as soon as he observed him, attempted to flee again. Seizing him by one of his horns, "Stay where thou art," exclaimed the shepherd, "and be not alarmed. I do not come to harm thee." These words, pronounced in tones of gentle kindness, reassured the youthful fugitive. "Aid me, then, I beseech thee," he said to Charis in accents that manifested the liveliest grief, "in restoring Nobe to life." As he spoke, he laid her upon the turf, and Charis, gathering some shells, hastened to fetch water in them from a neighbouring spring.

Upon returning, he found the Satyr attempting to revive the young girl by lavishing upon her the most endearing expressions. "Nobe," he cried, as his tears fell on to her bosom, "if thou dost not answer me, I shall die here by thy side!" Then turning to the Shepherd, he continued, "Ah, you cannot imagine how passionately I love her! Only restore her to me, and I shall owe you all my happiness."

The coldness of the water which Charis had sprinkled upon the young girl's face now restored her to consciousness. At first she breathed a deep sigh; then opening her lovely eyes she exclaimed, "Where am I?" and gazed at the Satyr with a look of alarm. "O Marcas! Marcas! hast thou torn me from my family? Where are my sisters, my companions?" she continued, in a torrent of tears. "Cruel one! would nothing satisfy thee but the sacrifice of all that is dear to me?—but who is this shepherd with the kindly face?"

"That I know as little as thou dost," replied Marcas, "but he seemed stricken with pity at seeing thee lying lifeless, and me in such bitter grief."

"Whoever thou art," exclaimed Nobe, stretching out her clasped hands towards Charis, "do not, I beseech thee, leave me alone in this wood with Marcas. He knows that I love him, and he has already taken too great an advantage of my weakness by bringing me into this wild savage place against my will."

"Reassure thyself, fair Nobe," replied Charis, "this is no wild savage spot where thou now art. This island is sacred to Apollo. I am his favoured servant, and Venus, too, has richly lavished her favour upon me. By the deities I worship I swear to defend thee from all peril. But deign to tell me in what land thou wert born, and how thou camest hither."

Drawing away her hand, which Marcas was covering with kisses, Nobe replied as follows :

"I cannot tell thee, O favoured servant of Apollo, how I come to be in this island, for that I know not myself; but what I can tell thee, I will. I was born in the little isle of Acria, sacred to Bacchus, and often honoured by the presence of the God himself. During my childhood I used to witness the festivals celebrated in his worship, but, too young to participate in them, I could only wait with patience till I should be old enough to take part in the orgies of the Bacchantes. Having completed my third lustrum at the commencement of the Spring, and my hand having been promised to the warrior

Corosophores, I was granted permission to participate in the next festival in honour of Bacchus.

“I was sporting with my comrades on the sea-shore, when the High-Priest Bullis came to announce to us the arrival of the God himself. Immediately a divine frenzy seized us ; we rent our linen robes, and covered ourselves with tiger skins, and the High-Priest distributed to us crowns and thyrsuses of vine leaves. Then we hastened to meet the God who was animating us. Soon he appeared on the plain, throned in a car drawn by panthers. Never had I seen him looking so handsome. His merry face and ruddy complexion combined all the charms of youth. He was bearing a thyrsus of extreme height, and a wreath of vine leaves linked him to the beauteous Erigone, who was seated by his side, and whom he surveyed with amorous glances. A throng of Satyrs, amongst whom I recognised Marcas, were dancing round the car, and playing on various instruments of music ; others were carrying torches, and shaking their fires in the air. The old Silenus, reeling from intoxication, followed far behind on his lazy beast. The near presence of the God thrilled us with fresh transports. We mingled with the Satyrs, and exchanged our thyrsuses for their torches. Alas ! Marcas must surely have borrowed Cupid’s own, for, as soon as he had given it to me, I sighed deeply, I who had never known what it was to sigh before. At last we reached the temple, making the triumph-song of Bacchus and Erigone reach high heaven itself. The divine pair seated themselves on a throne of grassy turf, over which arched an arbour of vines loaded with the most luscious

grapes, and forming the fairest canopy. A thousand streams of wine gushed from the temple, and poured in cascades over the white marble of the steps.

“Soon the old Silenus, who seemed to wake up from a deep sleep, began to spur on the Satyrs, who crowded round him, and drank in wild excess; while the Bacchantes rejoiced in the fondling caresses of Erigone. Knowing that I was to receive the fetters of Hymen, she asked me if I loved Corosophores. I replied candidly that I had always feared him, and had only accepted his hand in obedience to my mother’s commands. Then Erigone desired to know if I loved anyone else. I know not what answer I made, but I blushed deeply, for Marcas’s eyes had already told me that he loved me.

“The Satyrs were now beginning to yield to the effects of intoxication, and were reposing in drunken sleep on the barrels from which the divine juice was flowing. Marcas alone had preserved his senses whilst celebrating the rites of Bacchus; and he followed me when I ran off into the gardens of the temple. ‘Nobe,’ he said to me, ‘as long as the festival lasts I shall be very happy, for I shall see thee every day; but when we have left this island, who will console me for thy absence, for I love thee, Nobe, even as Bacchus loves Erigone?’ ‘Beware of nourishing such a love,’ I answered him, ‘for I must not listen to it.’ ‘What dost thou say, Nobe? Ah, if thou wouldst return my love, how happy might we be! The woods are the asylum of lovers. Come with me, I beseech thee; a grotto with the beloved one is better than the temples of the Gods.’ ‘Alas! dost thou not know that

I am the promised bride of Corosophores?' and I could say no more; my tears betrayed my heart, for I loved Marcas, and he saw it too clearly. I fled away from him, and refused to hear aught further; and from that day I avoided being alone with him, although he haunted me everywhere.

"At last the celebration came to an end, and with bitter grief I saw the moment approach which would separate me from Marcas. My love for my mother kept me from following him. Corosophores, whom I utterly abhorred, was going to be my husband. These sad reflections quite calmed my Bacchic transports, and rendered me sadly meditative. I went to wander by the shore of the bay which washes our island, on the side where the temple lies. The sun was near his setting; his rise would mark the end of the festival. I was just beginning to surrender myself to my grief, when I saw Marcas coming towards me. Despair gleamed in his eyes. 'I have come to bid thee farewell, cold-hearted Nobe,' he said, 'for the day which tears thee from me will surely see me die. How, indeed, could I continue living? I adore thee, and thou hatest me! Happy Corosophores! it is thou who wilt possess the heart which Love surely meant to be mine!' 'No, Marcas,' I replied, 'I will never belong to Corosophores; but my mother will never permit me to give myself to thee, so that thou wilt not have to suffer alone. Go, leave me now, but I will never forget thee!' 'Ah, thou dost love me, then, Nobe!' he cried rapturously. 'Yes, thou dost indeed love me; it is fear which makes thee fight against the promptings of thine heart. Well, I must find a

means of overcoming it.' As he said this, he unfastened my girdle ; and then, having, in spite of all my cries and struggles, tied me securely to himself, he plunged into the bay. Terror having deprived me of my senses, I know not how we escaped from the waters, or whether Marcas really intended to end his life and mine together."

Here Nobe ceased, and breathed a deep sigh.

"O cruel one!" exclaimed Marcas, "canst thou believe that I entertained the hateful thought of destroying thy life in the flower of thy youth? Take back such an unjust accusation, Nobe, and pardon thy unhappy lover. I knew the bay well, and that the island of Nicæa was not far off, and I was confident that my strength would enable me to swim across in safety. I could see that Love had wounded thee with the same dart as he had wounded me ; I was in imminent danger of losing thee ; the opportunity was favourable, and I profited by it that I might make us both happy. Thy abductor is thy most devoted lover. Believe this, O dearest Nobe, and dry thy tears, which rack my heart, or rather let my kisses wipe them away. What! thou refuseth my caresses! Thou wishest me to die, then? Why dost thou fear to give thyself to me? Here in the forest I will choose some pleasant grotto for thee. I will deck it with the brilliant wings of the butterflies, and delicately carved shells shall serve us as drinking-cups. Thou shalt have flowers and birds in plenty ; thou shalt follow me when I go hunting ; we will live on fruit and milk ; and when the feast-days come round, we will return amongst our fellows

to worship the Gods. My Nobe shall ever have my heart's love ; I swear it before thee, O favoured one of Apollo !”

“ I receive thy oath,” said Charis ; “ but why, O fair Nobe, wilt thou not consent to remain in this island ? Thou wilt find here other hearts as mild and gentle as that of Marcas. Cupid has just extended his empire over us, and reared a throne in his mother's honour. I myself will present thee to the Goddess, for I am her happy lover.”

“ Deign then, I pray thee,” exclaimed the Satyr, “ to plead with her, and to soften my Nobe's heart.”

“ There is no longer any need to do so,” said the maiden, gaily. “ I yield to Love. It is time now to reveal my own, for I feel that I adore thee. 'Twould be vain for me to try to conceal it from thee any longer, Marcas. Receive my homage, O all-powerful Venus, and the oath which I, in my turn, take to live for Marcas alone !”

As a radiant dawn ofttimes succeeds a night of murky storm, so now did glad hope return to the heart of Marcas. No more did he think of flight. Nobe loved him, and consented to unite herself to him. All places were the same to him so long as she was with him. He now invited the shepherd to taste some of the delicious wine which he had brought with him from the festival of Bacchus in a leather bottle which hung from his girdle. The divine juice thrilled Charis with a sweet transport. He was eager to hymn the praises of the God who was animating him, and, taking up his lyre, he sang in strains whose sweetness touched Nobe's heart.

“O charming Bacchus!” he began; “who, sweet God, could withstand thee? Thou sharest with Love the empire over all hearts. How many times has thy divine liquid saved him the necessity of winging an arrow! Thy nectar serves him equally well as his own weapons; and when old age freezes our senses thou thrillst them with fresh life, and makest us once more capable of glad love. Father of mirth and gaiety, thou banishest gloom and anxiety. Yes, indeed, it behoves us to enjoy thy gifts, and to seize the opportunity of pleasure. Lose not your time, then, O young lovers whom Bacchus excites and Love favours; crown yourselves with flowers and vine leaves, for it is Bacchus alone, who, together with Love, can make you happy.”

So sang Charis, and Nobe poured out more wine for him. A sweet intoxication laid hold of his senses, and it was in vain that he attempted to continue his strains. His eyelids were already closed. Nobe, who looked at him with smiling eyes, tried to call him back to himself, but soon a deep slumber robbed him of all consciousness.

Scarcely had the shepherd fallen asleep, when Cupid led Marcas and Nobe into the temple of the Graces, which became for them the temple of the Pleasures.





V.



THE Sun was blazing in mid-heaven, and his fierce rays seemed to have set the sky on fire; weary wayfarers were turning aside to seek some spring where they might cool their parched throats; the shepherds were leading their flocks into the forests to rest in the cool breezy shade; the harvesters were deserting the burning fields, and seeking protection from the torrid noontide heat beneath the shelter of the rocks; and the youthful Nymphs were sporting in the willow-shaded pools, when Venus once more returned to the island of Nicæa, accompanied only by Cupid, and preceded by Hope. As soon as she appeared in sight, Cephissa and her companions ran forward to meet her. The Goddess inquired for Charis.

“We have not seen him,” Cephissa replied, “but a Bacchante and a Satyr, whom we met in the plantations by the temple as the dawn was breaking, told us that they had left him sleeping in the wood.”

Then Nobe and Marcas, who had mingled with the throng,



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Alban Wolfe

stepped forward. "Goddess," said Nobe, "the shepherd whom thou hast taken into thy favour has led me to hope that thou wouldst accept our homage. Give me leave, I pray thee, to go and tell him that thou hast returned."

"I will come with thee myself," replied Venus; "I would rather surprise him unannounced."

She supported herself on Nobe's arm, and, as they walked on together, the Goddess asked the girl how she had come to be in her temple with a Satyr. Nobe told her story in a few sentences, and Venus promised her her favour.

All the Nicæan damsels had by this time spread themselves through the wood, and were calling out Charis's name. The echoes returned their voices, and at first they thought it was the shepherd that they heard. They all eagerly sought to find him, and each one strove to be the first to discover him.

Venus, who seemed to have borrowed her son's wings, quickly arrived at the spot where Nobe had left Charis asleep, but the shepherd was no longer there. The Goddess, ill at ease, ordered her dove to fly into the most secluded parts of the wood, whilst she herself hastening with her followers towards the valley where she had first met Charis, aroused the echoes of the forest with her lover's name. Why was he deaf to those dear accents? Why did he not reply to the anxious impatience of the loving Venus? Could it be, oh horrid thought! that wild beasts had devoured him while he slept? or that the Gods, jealous of his happiness, had bereft him of life? These possibilities racked Venus with

the keenest agony. As she entered the grotto where she had hoped she might find her lover, she fell down on the mossy bed which had been the throne of her joys. O Love ! Love ! is not even Venus herself exempt from thy sickening fears ?

The light-footed Zima now appeared, but only to augment the Goddess's alarms. She had been all over the island, and no one had seen aught of Charis. The dove presently followed her, and her mournful notes announced that she had seen nothing of the shepherd. Then Venus's grief broke forth in bitter wailings, which were interrupted only by her tears ; and she was quite insensible to the fond caresses of her son, and the Nicæan maidens, who eagerly strove to console her.

“Am I then doomed to lose thee,” she cried, “when I love thee so tenderly ? O Charis, Charis, where art thou ? Even if thou art faithless, fear not to come to me. Though thou art perjured, yet still will I adore thee ; I could never take vengeance on so sweet a head. But no ! he is not faithless. The jealous Gods will not suffer him to be happy, and, if he still lives, he is enduring the same torments as I. I observed the astonishment of the Gods when the Graces first broke upon their sight in Olympus. Jupiter himself could not restrain an impulse of jealousy, and Apollo seemed annoyed. Alas ! can it indeed be that that inestimable gift with which thou hast dowered the Universe in the person of the Graces, whilst arousing the admiration of all, has brought thee to thy doom by exciting base envy against thee ? Charis ! Charis ! O my sweet love, it is I who have slain thee ! The thought is agony to me !”

Venus could say no more ; and, letting her head fall on the bosom of Cephissa, she lay in mournful silence. The gentle maidens gazed at her in sympathetic grief ; and Nobe whispered to Marcas, " Oh, how I pity her ! I should have been as distressed as she is if I had lost thee."

Cupid, however, now threw himself at his mother's knees, and tried to console her. He covered her hand with kisses, and conjured her not to abandon hope ; and eventually by his caresses he succeeded in rekindling its light in her heart.

" I am only too anxious to believe thee, my son," she said ; " I will go with thee, and thoroughly search this fatal island in person."

As she thus spoke, she rose up, and made her way down into the valley, casting searching glances all around her. Presently she arrived in the town. All the inhabitants prostrated themselves before her, seized by the religious awe which is inspired by the presence of the deities. The Goddess was racked with too bitter pangs to allow the homage of the people to detain her. Her hair was streaming in loose disorder, and she carried in her hand a veil of gauze with which she wiped away the tears that streamed from her sweet eyes. She ran to the temple of Apollo ; she demanded her lover from the throng of people that surrounded it ; she demanded him from the women, from the young girls, from the children. Their silence expressed their surprise. Then the Goddess returned to the forest, and demanded Charis of the echoes, of the streamlets, of the verdure, of the trees themselves. She stood gazing with searching eyes at the spots

where they had conversed together. The sight of their ciphers interlaced and carved on the tender bark of the trees at first rooted her motionless to the ground; but presently she covered the memorials of her joy with amorous kisses, and, racked with bitter despair, exclaimed: "Oh, now that I have lost thee I will stay for ever amid these scenes, where I shall always have before me a livelier recollection of my sweet love. Oh why, thou cruel Destiny, didst thou ever bring me forth from the bosom of the waves? Why hast thou made me immortal, since I am fated to be racked with such bitter torments? A thousand times more blessed is she who can die when she has lost all that she loves! But thou, O unhappy Venus, art deprived of this mitigation of thy woe! Yet why should I remain in this island where everything serves but to embitter my grief? I will flee away from its fatal shores; and I will banish myself to the extremities of the earth, there to hide my tears and my despair, for never again will I mount up into high Olympus, unless it be to carry away the Graces, my sweet companions, the daughters of my Charis. Alas! him I have lost for ever, and without knowing who it is that hath separated us. If, ah me! thou hast been ravished away to the abodes of the dead, let thy beloved shade float up hither and mingle its sad murmurs with my sighs; it is I, I, who am the innocent cause that has brought thee to thy end! Oh, what hideous words am I uttering? Thou canst not be dead! Thou livest, surely thou livest! What God could be so barbarous as to lay murderous hands on so sweet a life? Oh, this horrible uncer-

tainty that racks me ! When Adonis was ravished from me, I could at least rain my tearful kisses on his dying lips ; and I did all that I could to lighten his cruel fate by giving him fresh existence as a fair flower. Ah, Charis, did I love him as I love thee ? No ; he was not dowered with charms like thine, and, more than all, he lacked thy spell-casting genius. O ye loving maids that dwell in this isle, may ye be happier than I ! Farewell, dear ones ; be not cast down ; the Graces and Love will ever look down upon you with their smiling favour. Farewell ; ye have shared my woe for long enough ; I will hie me where I may suffer alone the agony of my grief."

"Stay, stay, my mother !" exclaimed Cupid in mournful alarm ; "surely thou wilt not punish the world for the injustice of Fate by robbing it of Beauty ! Come, beloved mother, let us go and consult Destiny. It may be that thy lover no longer enjoys the light, or it may be that some hostile influence keeps him from thee. Whichever it be, Destiny will be able to tell us."

He spoke with such loving sympathy that his mother could not deny his request, and once more she soared up with him into the heavens to seek the palace of Destiny.

Amidst the clouds which surround high Olympus lies a fog-shrouded road, which leads to a lofty mountain formed of the fragments of chaos. At the foot of it yawns the cavern, impenetrable to mortals, where Destiny delivers his oracles. Venus succeeded in reaching it, by the aid of Cupid's torch. She saw the old man, bent beneath the weight of his years,

supporting himself on the urn wherein lie the various lots of mortal men. At the sight of Love and Beauty, Destiny raised his trembling head, and smiled at them.

"I know what brings thee hither," he said to Venus; and as he spoke he opened the book of destinies. "What is it that I see?" then exclaimed the old man. "An irrevocable decree, sweet Goddess, separates thee from him thou lovest. He has incurred the wrath of the Gods. Alas! their anger has fallen upon him because they will not brook that mortal man should show himself their equal."

He then went up close to his urn, and began to listen earnestly to a dull sound that seemed to issue from it. After keeping silence for a few moments, he again spoke.

"The Muses, O Goddess, angered at Love having caused the suppression of the celebrations in honour of Coresia, have sworn to take vengeance upon Charis, whose duty it was to defend their rites. Apollo, jealous of the shepherd's talents and of the honours which thou wert preparing for him, took fear lest men should raise altars in his worship; and, Charis having forgotten the oath which bound him to his temple, the offended God no longer restrained his anger, but leagued himself with the Muses. They commanded Morpheus to cast a spell over the shepherd in some unknown cave. Taking advantage of the opportunity offered by Charis when he yielded to the influence of Bacchus, Morpheus made him his captive; and by the aid of his airy dream-sprites has transported him to a place which I may not reveal to thee. But let this thought console thee, O all-beauteous

Venus; he whose brilliant imagination could give birth to the Graces can never be forgotten. Such is the grand destiny of the Poet. His memory survives. Injustice cannot slay it. It braves and conquers the persecutions of both men and Gods. The genius of Charis will inspire all those upon whom Apollo confers his highest favours, and men will often doubt which of them is the true father of the Graces. Voltaire will speak their language, and cause the balance to incline. But though the Graces shall ever remain in the train of Beauty—for it has been decreed that they shall be its companions—they can only be born of the charms of Poesy and the unsophisticated simplicity of Nature.



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